

I would be very interested to know whether those who refuse to cooperate with an OIG request can still obtain taxpayer money through government contracts. The Biden administration has claimed, time and again, that it is the most transparent administration in U.S. history. Well, I think I just gave you an example that that is not true, and it certainly hasn't been true, in this case, for emphasis.

The VA deserves much better. Of course, the VA serves our veterans, and our veterans deserve much better from that Agency. The VA needs to start being as transparent as they claim to be transparent and cooperate with this investigation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The senior Senator from Wyoming.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to talk about the economic crisis that the American people are living through, caused by Joe Biden.

The American people have just had the most expensive Fourth of July of all times. It is interesting what a difference a year and a half makes. Last July, 6 months into the Biden administration, the White House was insisting inflation was either nonexistent or transitory. The White House even bragged that the cost of a July 4 cookout last year had dropped 16 cents—not 16 percent but 16 cents—from the year before. Here we are, 1 year later, with 1 year of Democratic control, and the cost of that same cookout is up not just 16 cents but 16 percent. Hamburgers, hot dogs, potato salad—across the board—everything is up. This July 4, the only way to save money was to stay home.

According to one survey, one out of every three Americans changed their summer travel plans for this summer because of high gas prices. People are driving less; they can't afford gas. They are shopping less; they can't afford the food, and they are getting a lot less from their paychecks.

The New York Times says people—I was astonished by this—are even using up vacation days so they don't have to drive in to work because they cannot afford the gas. They are using vacation days so they don't have to drive because they can't afford the gas. The average American family is now paying \$100 more each and every week just to buy the same things that they bought a year ago. So just to stay even is \$100 more a week this year than last. Week after week after week, in the Joe Biden economy, people can afford less and less and less. One study from the University of Michigan showed the Biden era had already seen the steepest drop in disposable income since Herbert Hoover.

Who could believe it?

The savings rate right now is the lowest since the great recession of 2009. Household debt is the highest ever. People are trying to borrow or spend

their savings just to keep up and to maintain the sorts of things they could afford easily last year. Consumer confidence in this country, right now, is at an alltime low. The concern, of course, is that the worst may yet be coming. More and more experts say we are headed toward a recession. A recession is when the economy shrinks for 6 months in a row.

Two weeks ago, the Commerce Department updated their estimate of economic growth for the first 3 months of the year, and the update said the economy had grown even less and had shrunk more than they had thought. The economy shrank more than the Biden Commerce Department admitted to in their first assessment, but there are already signs all around the country that the economy is shrinking. No wonder, in a national poll last week, only 1 in 10 Americans thinks the economy is heading in the right direction. Inflation plus a recession is called stagflation. I don't think we have had that since the days of Jimmy Carter, likely when the Presiding Officer was either a little boy or hadn't yet been born.

Democrats have run Washington for 17 full months now, and they are doing absolutely nothing here at home to bring down the pain at the pump or the pain at the grocery store.

Joe Biden says gas prices will remain high for “as long as it takes.” He says we just have to suffer through it, and he blames everything today on the war in Ukraine. He won't admit to the fact that the inflation crisis started 10 months before the war in Ukraine. Gas prices had already gone up by \$1.15 a gallon before Putin's invasion.

The American people get it. They remember all of this. It doesn't matter what Joe Biden happens to say. Of course, he is off to Saudi Arabia tomorrow, looking for more oil, when we have plenty of it in the United States. The American people clearly know who to blame for the inflation that is causing them pain every single day.

It is interesting to see that even Jimmy Carter's economists blame Joe Biden and the Democrats in Congress for the inflation that is hitting the country today.

Last week, the New York Times published an interview with Jimmy Carter's top economic advisers. They were asked what lessons they had learned from the miserable failures of the Carter administration. Jimmy Carter's Secretary of the Treasury, Michael Blumenthal, put the blame for today's inflation on the spending by Joe Biden and the Democrats. This is Jimmy Carter's Treasury Secretary pointing his finger at Joe Biden and the Democrats. Jimmy Carter's Treasury Secretary said that Democrats need to give up the gimmicks, turn off the money printer, and stop the reckless spending.

This is at a time when, behind closed doors, Senator SCHUMER and others are trying to come up with another gim-

mick to add more spending and higher taxes.

This article in the New York Times says:

Mr. Blumenthal urged Mr. Biden . . . to abandon his [Build Back Better bill]—

I call it “Build Back Biden.” He said he should abandon that—in favor of deficit reduction.

He said:

[F]ighting inflation comes first. . . . [B]y trying to take half measures . . . you merely prolong the pain.

The American people are tired of the pain that has been imposed upon them by Joe Biden and the Democrats in this body and across the floor.

Well, he is right. Jimmy Carter's Treasury Secretary is right. Fighting inflation needs to come first. Yet, for Joe Biden, fighting inflation has come last or not at all—denial that it even existed, dismissing it as “don't worry,” and continuing today to try to avoid the reality that he is facing.

You know, the Democrats in this body could learn something from the Carter administration. After all, Joe Biden has an even lower approval rating. It is hard to believe. I would have never believed, on the day Joe Biden was inaugurated, that by the Fourth of July weekend of 2022 that Joe Biden would have earned—fully earned—an approval rating lower than Jimmy Carter had. Remember, Jimmy Carter lost his reelection bid to Ronald Reagan.

So far, Democrats seem to have learned nothing. Last March, Republicans warned the Democrats that their spending and borrowing would cause inflation. Democrats ignored the warning.

Senator SCHUMER even said:

I do not think the dangers of inflation . . . in the near term are very real.

That may have been a New Yorker's view of it, but people around the country had a clear understanding that inflation was coming, and it did. It turned out Senator SCHUMER was wrong, and the dangers were very, very real for working families.

So the rich liberals in New York and the rich liberals in California who run the Democratic Party will be just fine. It is the working families who are trying to pay their bills every day—they are the ones who are paying the price for these reckless policies of the Democratic Party.

Democrats remain completely out of touch with American workers. It is obvious. Last March, all 50 Senate Democrats put an additional \$2 trillion on the national debt. The Biden inflation crisis started, and the fire of inflation started 1 month later.

Last week's New York Times article also quotes a Carter Treasury official who warned against socialist price controls with regard to energy. So what did the House Democrats just do? They just voted for socialist price controls. Now Senate Democrats seem to be eager to do the same thing.

Democrats are ignoring the warning signs once again. It seems they refuse

to learn the lessons of the Carter years. What have the Democrats learned in the last 18 months—anything? I don't think they have learned a thing, especially with regard to American energy. Joe Biden is continuing to restrict American energy, is continuing to give speeches against American energy, and then is going hat in hand to Venezuela, to Iran, and now, this week, to Saudi Arabia, saying: Please produce more energy.

This is the first time in 64 years that there will be no offshore energy lease sales this year—the first time in 64 years. Joe Biden is now considering blocking all offshore oil and gas leases for the next 5 years—no jobs for the people, no affordable energy for the folks and the families. No. He is just now lifting his blockade on onshore oil and gas leases that has been there since day 1 of his administration. Why is he doing it now? Well, he is doing it, kicking and screaming, because the Federal court forced his hand. After 17 months in office, when President Obama was there, they had held 40 lease sales. Joe Biden's energy strategy has now sunk us to a new low.

What is he doing now? What is the President's new approach? Because he wants to just belittle people in energy who make their livelihoods that way.

I mean, it is astonishing, the President of the United States tweeting about mom-and-pop gas stations in your neighborhood and mine. It is hard to believe, but it is true. Last week, the President of the United States tweeted a demand that gas stations bring down their prices. If only it were that easy.

You wonder, what does President Biden really understand about the way the world works and about the lives that people lead?

Prices aren't set by gas stations, and prices aren't set by Presidential tweets. They are set by supply and demand. It is economics 101. Gas stations aren't the problem. Gas stations would love to bring down prices overall. They can't do it. If demand is down because people can't afford to drive, that will lower the prices a bit. Today, the average is about \$4.65 a gallon. On the day Joe Biden came into office, it was \$2.38 a gallon. We are still at almost double the cost of a gallon of gas today, under Joe Biden and his policies, than we were the day he took office.

If you want to really lower prices at the pump and get to where we were on the day that Joe Biden came into office, we need more American energy. We have it. We have it here in the United States, and Joe Biden and the Democrats will not let us get it out of the ground.

So what are the Democrats in the Senate doing about these repeated failures by Joe Biden?

Well, right now, they are, once again, threatening another reckless tax-and-spending spree. They are planning a repeat of what got us into this inflation crisis in the first place. It is terrible

economics, and it is not even good politics. So just before the midterm elections, the Democrats are attempting to pass legislation that is going to make America's problems even worse.

They are proposing another reckless spending bill, and it is more reckless than the one last year because inflation is a lot higher now. Spending even more money is going to make today's prices go even higher.

According to media's report, the latest version of the Democrat bill includes more than \$100 billion in new taxes. Nobody knows exactly what is in it. We hear up to a trillion dollars in taxes. Many of these taxes are going to fall on American energy producers. If you have higher taxes on energy producers, who do you think is going to end up paying that? The people who have to use energy, who are the men and women going to work filling up their cars with gas, trying to take their kids to school, cutting back on vacations because they can't afford the gas.

The Secretary of the Treasury says, Well, you don't like the high price of gas? Buy an electric car.

Easy for him to say. Electric vehicle prices are up because of Joe Biden's inflation. They are 20 percent higher now than they were a year ago. How many Americans can go out and afford to buy one of these very expensive electric vehicles? Very few.

We are talking about a clueless administration, a clueless President, and a clueless Secretary of Transportation and Secretary of Energy who have promoted such policies.

Joe Biden should remember that in 2008, Senator Barack Obama said this:

[Y]ou don't raise taxes in a recession.

This is Senator Barack Obama in 2008, Presidential candidate Barack Obama in 2008:

[Y]ou don't raise taxes in a recession. The last thing you want to do is to raise taxes in a recession.

Yet that may be the party platform of the Democrats for this November.

The Democrats' attacks on American energy have been relentless. They are obsessed with stopping the use of fossil fuels, absolutely obsessed and worshipping at the altar of energy that is dependent on the weather. That is what they are proposing. The Democrats think that that is the winning sales pitch going into November.

Democrats I talk to privately admit that they expect to be stripped of power in November, NANCY PELOSI no longer Speaker of the House, her efforts to make sure that the Republicans are in the majority in the Senate. Democrats know the clock is running out on them, that they are not going to be able to do something like reconciliation to force down the throats of the American people, costly policies, tax increases, and regulations that the American people would never be in support of.

This is their last hope, their last Hail Mary pass to put into place policies of

the progressives that will help their group but hurt the country. It is absolutely wrong. It is one final try of the Democrats to increase spending, increase taxes, and, of course, increase the debt.

It doesn't seem the Democratic Party nationally or those on the Hill seem to care about that and the suffering of the American people who are living through the highest inflation in 40 years. The highest gas prices of all time until recently, massive debt, massive concerns, and incompetence—that is what the American people are looking at right now, and that is why, come November, what I believe, many, many Members, elected Democrats in the House and Senate, will be heading to the unemployment line.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUESTS—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, I rise today in support of the nominations of Dr. Lester Martinez-Lopez to be the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, Dr. Agnes Schaefer to be Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, and Mr. Franklin Parker to hold the same position within the Navy.

The office Dr. Martinez-Lopez is nominated for is responsible for ensuring that we are medically ready to fight and win wars. This is a critical role for our national security at all times, but, of course, it is even more important during a pandemic.

Leaving this office without leadership jeopardizes our ability to respond to this health crisis and prepare for the next one. Having spent more than two decades as an Army surgeon and commander of medical centers at major U.S. military bases both stateside and overseas, and more than a decade as a leader of private medical research organizations, Dr. Martinez-Lopez clearly has the experience to fill this position.

The Assistant Secretaries for Manpower and Reserve Affairs across the branches ensure our military and civilian workforce have the education, the training, and the skills needed to meet current and future threats. Mr. Parker, who is nominated to head this office for the Navy, has demonstrated his ability to fill the role and will be able to hit the ground running, having held the position before.

Dr. Schaefer, nominated to head this office for the Army, will bring firsthand knowledge from her 15 years at the RAND Corporation, where she specialized in military personnel policy, reserve component issues, national security strategy, and emerging threats.

All three of these positions play important roles in our national security. All three nominees to fill them were voted out of committee—a committee on which the Senator from Missouri serves—without objection—without objection—4 months ago. But all three remain vacant.